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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000270

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STATE FOR EUR/SCE (PFEUFFER), USNATO FOR AMB. NULAND

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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: POLITICAL DIALOGUE CONTINUES -- HARD
SLOG FORWARD

REF: SKOPJE 203

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Since the revival of political talks between the government and eAlbanian opposition party DUI on March 7, several working-level meetings between the two sides, monitored by the U.S. and EUSR, have produced an agreed list of some 38 laws that will be subject to the Badinter principle (double majority), a key DUI demand that the party links to implementation of the Framework Agreement (FWA). Despite that progress, DUI claims the government is not sincere about FWA implementation and insists it must have agreement on four major priority items before ending its boycott of Parliament. The Ambassador and her EUSR counterpart have made it clear to DUI that they must return to Parliament after reaching compromises on two of the four priority issues, with remaining issues to be discussed in normal parliamentary procedures, and that failure to do so will saddle the party with responsibility for holding up the country's NATO integration efforts. If DUI rejects reasonable compromise, it will find neither the US nor EU will support its intransigence. We believe there is a chance that DUI leader Ahmeti, facing a united U.S. and EU front that holds him accountable for any rupture in the dialogue process, will adjust his tactics and be willing to reach a compromise that returns DUI to Parliament when he meets with PM Gruevski next week. End summary.

WORKING GROUP INCHING FORWARD ON BADINTER LIST

¶2. (SBU) Since the revival of political talks between PM Gruevski and DUI party leader Ali Ahmeti on March 7 (reftel), a bi-partisan (VMRO-DPMNE and DUI) working group, with US Embassy and EUSR observers, has met six times over the past several weeks to hash out an agreement on a list of laws that would require Badinter (double majority) voting, a key DUI demand for ending its boycott of Parliament. So far, the group has agreed to roughly 38 laws, most of them related to decentralization, that would require a Badinter vote. That is far short of DUI's proposed 127 Badinter laws, but does reflect government concessions in several areas.

¶3. (SBU) A final working group meeting is scheduled for April 10, at which the two sides are expected to discuss a remaining 17 laws that VMRO-DPMNE believes could fall under

the Badinter rubric. The government is adamant that it cannot accept Badinter voting for the remaining 70 or so laws (many of them dealing with security matters or the judiciary), insisting that the Framework Agreement language on double majority voting cannot be applied to them. DUI, as the proponent of the list of 127 laws, believes that all of them require Badinter voting. DUI leaders have admitted to us, however, that they are willing to settle for something less than their opening gambit, although they still want much more than VMRO-DPMNE appears willing to concede.

DESPITE PROGRESS, DUI HOLDS OUT FOR MORE BEFORE RETURNING TO PARLIAMENT

¶4. (C) Despite the progress on the Badinter law list, DUI argues that PM Gruevski is not serious about implementing the Framework Agreement and has insisted that the dialogue process lead to resolution of four key demands before it returns to Parliament. In a meeting with Ahmeti April 4, arranged by the U.S. side, the Ambassador and EUSR Fouere jointly told Ahmeti that it was imperative that he reach a compromise with the government on his top two concerns -- the Badinter list and agreement on recomposition of the Parliamentary Committee on Inter-ethnic Relations (reftel) -- and then return to Parliament, where the remaining issues would be discussed in normal parliamentary procedures.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador told Ahmeti that we believe the dialogue process has been productive so far, and that he is in a position to declare victory and move to a different format, in the Parliament, to keep the momentum moving forward. She warned that the dialogue process had not been intended as a permanent extra-parliamentary forum for

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negotiating DUI demands. If DUI failed to return to Parliament after resolving its top two concerns, the International Community would view that as a DUI attempt to turn the extra-parliamentary dialogue process into a permanent negotiating format, which we could not accept, and as undermining Macedonia's NATO integration efforts.

¶6. (C) Ahmeti remained obstinate, accusing Gruevski of trying to destroy the Framework Agreement. He said that he could not return to Parliament unless the dialogue process led to resolution of his top priorities -- the Badinter laws list, the Committee on Inter-ethnic Affairs, a law to provide benefits to NLA veterans and their families, and a law on use of languages. He pledged he would not "return to Parliament, only to retreat again," and claimed that his political base was pressuring him to return DUI's MP mandates if the issues he had outlined were not resolved soon.

DUI "MOVING THE GOAL POSTS"

¶7. (C) The Ambassador told Ahmeti that he was "moving the goal posts" by increasing the number of conditionalities for ending DUI's parliamentary boycott. If DUI remained outside of Parliament, the government would move ahead on reforms without them and DUI would end up without any voice in the process. She suggested that Ahmeti explore the option of agreeing with Gruevski that no law on languages would be passed without first obtaining a consensus of all the eAlbanian parties. That would allow DUI to return to Parliament with a guarantee that it would have input into such a law. Ahmeti was skeptical, saying he did not believe that DPA (eAlbanian governing coalition partner) would support such a consensus.

NEXT STEPS -- LEADERSHIP MEETING

¶8. (C) As mentioned above, the Badinter laws working group will meet again next week, and a Gruevski-Ahmeti meeting is planned after that to reach a final compromise on that issue and on the reconstitution of the Inter-ethnic Relations Committee. We will meet with Gruevski's staff on April 10 to

explore options for reconstituting the Committee, and to press for additional government concessions to increase the number of Badinter laws on the current list. After the working group meeting on April 10, the Ambassador will meet with Gruevski to convey the message that now is the time for him to be magnanimous with DUI on the Badinter list and the Committee, especially given his recent high poll ratings that give him a 3:1 edge over the opposition.

COMMENT

19. (C) Ahmeti views the dialogue process as a low-cost (for DUI) vehicle for achieving results on its priority agenda items without the messy horse-trading required to pass legislation in a Parliamentary setting. In clinging to that belief, he has misjudged the patience of the international community and the willingness of the government to make major concessions to get DUI back into Parliament. He also has misjudged the willingness of other parties -- in both government and opposition -- to accept the results of any such compromises as accomplished facts without full parliamentary involvement and debate. As he mulls over the U.S. and EU messages delivered at the April 4 meeting, we believe Ahmeti will conclude that his space for maneuver has narrowed significantly, and that he will make minor adjustments in his position that bring him closer to a compromise with the government.

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